

# Introduction



**H**ave you ever felt stuck, unable to make progress in your personal and spiritual growth, because you were holding onto things that were no longer working, or perhaps never worked at all? If so, you are invited to read more.

A very close brush with death while a student pilot in my early thirties greatly changed my outlook on life. It began a process of reevaluating how I was living and weeding out those things that had been holding me back. Whenever I shared this story over the years, people would invariably tell me that it inspired them to also let go of things and move forward in their lives.

It was a typical Southern California day in June of 1990. A few minutes earlier, I had taken off from Van Nuys Airport on my third solo flight in a two-seater Cessna 150. Below me, the hills around Simi Valley shimmered a golden brown in the desert sun, a beautiful sight to behold.

It was over Simi Valley that I would practice one of the most dangerous flight maneuvers: an approach to landing stall recovery. As the name suggests, this maneuver is practiced at a high

altitude to make sure there is room for recovery if anything goes wrong.

“Burbank Approach,” I said into the radio, “this is Cessna One Five Zero Golf Sierra. I am a student pilot and will practice approach to landing stall recovery over Simi Valley at twenty-five hundred feet. Please advise of any approaching aircraft.”

I knew exactly what to do, having practiced this maneuver many times with Paul, my flight instructor. But this time was different. I was all by myself, with no flight instructor to take the controls if something went wrong. I could not make any mistakes. With sweaty palms, I prepared the maneuver. After rocking the plane to make sure there are no other aircraft under me or near me, I pulled the control wheel to reduce the air speed. To maintain altitude, I pushed in the throttle a little; then, to simulate a landing approach, I lowered the flaps – first fifteen degrees, then thirty and, finally, forty-five degrees. I maintained a straight and level flight, pulling the wheel closer and closer towards me. The air speed was getting down towards the stall speed of forty-two knots in landing configuration and the stall warning horn went off. Now the plane felt very unstable. In order to practice a quick recovery, I pulled the wheel even closer to further reduce the air speed, stalling the plane. Everything was going according to plan.

At this point I was expecting the nose to drop, but – what is this? – the left wing dropped before the right wing did. My heart was in my stomach as I realized I had inadvertently gotten myself into a downward spiral, also known as “the graveyard spiral.” Before me, the ground was spinning like a disk. The hand on

the altimeter kept turning, showing the rapid descent. The air-speed indicator had rapidly climbed from forty-two knots to one hundred-twenty knots. The realization that these will be the last few seconds of my life flashed through my mind.

Then my survival instinct kicked in. I immediately pulled the throttle to avoid additional downward acceleration by the engine, then pulled in the flaps to protect them from bending or breaking at this high speed. But nothing I do had any effect. A thought to call the tower to ask for help was quickly dismissed; there was simply not enough time.

*To live through this would take a miracle...*

And with that thought, I took my hands off the wheel and my feet off the pedals, and cried out, “God take this plane!!”

In an instant, the plane got out of the downward spiral and into a straight and level flight. A look at the altimeter told me that within seconds I had gone from twenty-five hundred feet down to fifteen hundred feet above the ground. I just dropped one thousand feet! I knew that had I held onto the controls any longer I would have run myself right into the ground. I had to let go of the controls completely and let God take over. He was the only one who could get me out of this life-threatening situation, and He did.

Today, I look back on this terrifying experience as the biggest blessing of my life. And while this is (hopefully) a more drastic wakeup call than most people receive, its lesson, I believe, is applicable to any situation in which we need to let go of something. When we try to control situations, we often make them

worse. When we let God take over, miracles happen. We should see God, not as a copilot to be called upon only in times of distress, but our captain, all the time.

Remember what the Psalmist has written:

“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Psalm 50:15; NKJV).

“As for me, I will call upon God, And the LORD shall save me” (Psalm 55:16; NKJV).

In the following chapters, you will be challenged to reflect upon and let go of whatever is holding you back. By no means is this an exhaustive list of the types of “baggage” people carry, but it is my hope that it will help you begin the process of excavating your mind and heart. At times you may be surprised by what you have been carrying around like a sack of bricks over your shoulder. You may also feel like you’ve been carrying that sack around for so long you will never be able to set it down. Again, keep reading, for I will show you the tools to remove the clutter from your mind and see the truth of who you are meant to be.

At the end of each chapter you will be asked questions to contemplate and journal about. These are the same types of questions I ask my coaching clients, and some of them will be uncomfortable and cut right to the heart. Just know that they are not meant to hurt or judge, but to challenge you to reflect deeply on your journey and identify areas for potential growth. They are designed to help you come to “Aha” moments and breakthroughs that will change your life.